

THE HUMAN FACTOR OF QUALITY CHILD CARE PROGRAM: A CASE STUDY AT THE IIUM EDUCARE

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ABSTRACT – *Educating the young children is not an easy task. High quality education warrants measures be taken on the overall aspects of child care centres namely organizational and structures, programs and curriculum, environment, and health and safety aspects. The purpose of this study is to obtain understanding of the teachers' conception of quality child care. This case study is set at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) EDUCARE child care center aimed to better understand the needs of young children through the eyes of the teachers. Open ended interviews questions were used to extract teachers' experiences and concerns. Findings revealed that the human factor contributes to the main conception of quality that includes efficient management, staff commitment, environment, and teaching learning materials. Additional domains of quality such as systematic activities and safety is also stressed.*

1. INTRODUCTION

There has been growing evidence that high quality childhood education programs produce positive outcomes for children affecting their developing skills such as social, cognitive, and language skills [1]. The National Research Council's asserts that there is a relationship between the quality of Early Childhood Program and the positive outcome for children's development. Quality childcare environment does affect children's physical, emotional, and cognitive development. Emphasis on the few limits to be imposed on children, variety of play environment, developmentally appropriate activities to choose to play, and experienced teachers or care providers. A well planned, play oriented, and child centered child care is also to be considered in the quality child care definition [2]. The structure of a child care center is similar to the frame of a house. It includes the legal structure, written policies and procedures, the physical environment and the philosophical structure of the programme.

1.1 Quality Child Care Model

Literature emphasizes on the organization and structures in initiating the child care programs for the staff, parents and children. Most important is the role of leaders to develop and upgrade the program through coordinated, systemic efforts with stakeholders to create and support the mentioned infrastructure that will contribute to quality early childhood education [3].



Figure 1: Quality Child Care: Teachers's Conceptions.

In the Vision 2020, the commitment to the promotion of the importance of early childhood education has been drawn up and yet the result is far from what it is supposed to achieve. Despite the mushrooming childcare centers throughout Malaysia, the standardization of the childcare centers programme structure is seen to be difficult or even impossible. Very few studies have been conducted on care takers or teachers' understanding of early childhood programme quality in Malaysia. Knowing the positive outcomes of quality childcare, this is an attempt to understand the teachers' conceptions of quality childcare.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This paper aims to answer the followings:

- 1) What are the conceptions of teachers with regards to quality in child care program at IIUM EDUCARE?
- 2) What are teachers' preferred childcare characteristics?
- 3) Why is quality childcare program important?
- 4) What factors or elements contribute to quality childcare?

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses Charmaz's Constructivist Grounded Theory, a qualitative research methodology, within the interpretivist paradigm. Charmaz argues a Grounded Theory that is based on constructivism and interpretivism [4]. Participants consisted of teachers of the EDUCARE. Open ended interviews questions are designed to gather information concerning teachers' conceptions based on their insights and experiences of quality childcare programme at their own premises. This is followed with a Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The researcher then examined the interview transcripts for possible emerging themes through the open, axial and selective coding.

3.1 Structured In-depth Interviews

A loosely structured in-depth interview structure is specially design to extract information from participants.

Table 3.1: Interview Structure

	Theme	Content
1 st	Interviewee's background	- Experience & area of expertise
2 nd	Quality child care (Organisation)	- Leadership, management, work system
3 rd	Quality child care (Curriculum)	- Lessons & subjects, time, skills, pedagogy, technology, activities.
4 th	Quality child care (Environment)	- Indoor (Classes, play area, toilet) - Outdoor (play area)
5 th	Quality child care (Safety & Health)	- Equipment, food, medication & nursing

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis of interview and focus group data revealed four primary themes: (a) organization and structures, (b) program or curriculum, (c) environment, and (d) safety.

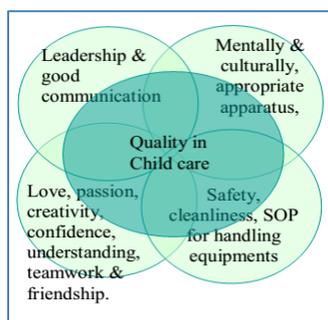


Figure 2: Human Factor of Quality Child Care: Emerging Themes

4.1 Organizations and Structures

The role of the management (leadership), capable, competent and efficient, in developing and upgrading the programs of the centre have great impact to the center. Coordinated, systemic efforts to create and support the mentioned infrastructure will contribute to quality early childhood education with the continuous assistance and engagement of stakeholders namely the teachers and parents. Good and efficient communication through regular and constant two way communication between staff and the management in the formal and informal meetings are seen to be a bridge for an effective relationship.

4.2 Health and Safety

A safe and clean environment is a crucial factor as children are easily infected by viruses from the environment. Proper food preparation and handling are to be taken care off by not neglecting the basic food nutritious for the children to grow healthily. Safety of equipments used are taken seriously such as making sure that all equipments have round and not sharp edges.

4.3 Programme and Curriculum

Developing mentally and culturally appropriate curriculum framework is essential towards excellent teaching and learning process. Programs must be designed to incorporate play activities that relates directly to children's growth and development. Age appropriate learning environment with specially design apparatus and carefully scheduled programmes ensure that time are managed wisely for quality education to take place. The education aspects such as language, cognitive, physical and emotion are further integrated systematically in work schedule, regulations and timetable of staff and children.

4.4 Environment (Teachers and Parents)

The commitment, creativity, love and passion towards children from all stakeholders namesly parents and teachers are crucial. Continuous and relevant training contribute to better learning experience for stakeholders contributing to better communication and confidence when handle situations. Establishing partnership with parents through activities such as meetings, gatherings, discussions, report day, and events brings about teamwork, understanding and friendship. A happy environment will make the teachers perform efficiently.

5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Conclusion

Participants conceptions of quality revolve around the human factor (leaders, staff and parents) effectiveness of administration and management with the children, staff as well as the parents, staff training, staff commitment, and the teaching and learning materials. This suggests the importance of the efficient management in policy development and service improvement. Thorough coordination and regulation of child care services need to be improvised and upgraded. Child care management need to be well versed in short terms and long terms planning of the quality aspect of child education handling challenges, problems and critical situations that determine quality child care program.

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